

Is the knowledge of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome new?

For centuries, mankind has suspected that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can harm the unborn child. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle observed that the children of drunken women were "morose and languid." The Bible contains a warning to pregnant women to "drink no wine or strong drink."

In 1834, a British study reported that infants of alcoholic mothers had a "starved, shriveled and imperfect look." Modern research has confirmed that drinking alcohol during pregnancy is dangerous to the developing baby.

Can a child with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome grow up to be a self-sufficient adult?

Many will. The behavioral and learning problems associated with FAS can make it hard for people with FAS to become completely independent. People with FAS often have trouble managing money, organizing their time or handling other daily responsibilities. They may have particular difficulty in school and require special help that is unique to their condition. They may also have difficulty getting and keeping a job. An early diagnosis, appropriate educational interventions, and other help from people who understand their needs all increase the chances that a person with FAS will succeed in society.

***You can help prevent FAS.
We all can.***

What can I do to prevent Fetal Alcohol Syndrome?

- If you are pregnant, don't drink alcohol.
- If you are trying to become pregnant, don't drink.
- If you think you might be pregnant, stop drinking right away.
- If you have trouble controlling your drinking, talk to your doctor or other health care provider. He or she can help you stop drinking and give your baby a better start in life.

Spread the word

If you know someone who is pregnant, encourage her not to drink alcohol and tell her why.

This brochure is the product of a collaboration among the Texas Office for Prevention of Developmental Disabilities, the Texas Birth Defects Monitoring Division of the Texas Department of Health, a parent of a child with FAS, and an educational consultant.

For more information, contact:
The Texas Office for Prevention of Developmental Disabilities
909 W. 45th Street, Austin, Texas 78751
(512) 206-4544 Fax (512) 206-4828



Produced by the
Texas Department
of Health

Stock No. 6-54 8/99

Drinking when Pregnant could result in Fetal Alcohol Syndrome



What is Fetal Alcohol Syndrome?

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is the name given to a pattern of physical and mental birth defects caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is the leading known cause of mental retardation in the United States. About 7,000 infants are born with **FAS** in the U.S. each year, or approximately 2 out of every 1,000 births. About 600 babies are born with **FAS** in Texas each year.

Children with **FAS** have a combination of physical and mental problems that can include: growth retardation, abnormal facial features, a small head, abnormal brain development, decreased intelligence, attention and behavioral problems, learning disabilities, emotional problems, and poor motor skills. Generally, their unique needs cannot be met by standard parenting styles or educational approaches, and they often need special help at home and in school.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome can be prevented by not drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

The damage caused by alcohol use during pregnancy is permanent. It cannot be cured or outgrown.

Questions often asked about FAS

☞ *How much alcohol will harm the unborn child?*

Researchers have not yet identified a safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. The safest choice is not to drink at all when you're pregnant or trying to become pregnant. It's something good you can do for your baby.

☞ *Is a beer safer than a shot of liquor?*

A beer, a glass of wine, a wine cooler, a mixed drink and a shot of liquor all contain the same amount of alcohol. They are equally dangerous to your baby.

☞ *What if I drink when I don't know that I am pregnant?*

As soon as you suspect you might be pregnant, stop drinking alcohol immediately. Your chances of having a healthy baby are greatly increased when you stop drinking.

☞ *Is there ever a safe time to drink during pregnancy?*

No. Alcohol crosses from the mother's blood into the baby's blood, so any time a pregnant woman drinks, her unborn baby drinks, too. Alcohol is dangerous to the developing baby throughout the pregnancy.

☞ *Does the father's drinking have any effect on the unborn child?*

The effects of the father's drinking on his sperm and on the unborn baby are not yet fully understood. However, the father can have a tremendous influence on his partner's drinking habits. By choosing not to drink, a father can support and encourage his pregnant partner to avoid alcohol.

☞ *Will a woman with FAS have children with FAS?*

No, not if she doesn't drink alcohol during pregnancy. People seem to inherit the tendency for alcohol abuse, and people with FAS may be more susceptible to alcoholism. But women with FAS, like all women, can protect their children from FAS by not drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

☞ *Isn't it only alcoholic women who have babies with FAS?*

You don't have to be an alcoholic or drink every day to have a baby with FAS. Any woman who drinks alcohol during pregnancy can cause damage to her unborn child.

☞ *Can Fetal Alcohol Syndrome be cured?*

No. *The damage caused by alcohol use during pregnancy is permanent.* It cannot be cured or outgrown.

continued on back